

Hiking Trails

To venture onto the lava fields of Craters of the Moon is to enter another world: black lava underfoot twisted like taffy, mounds of frothy rocks that crunch as you climb, and caves moist and dark below the baked surface of the lava flows.



Strange Features

Craters of the Moon sits astride the "Great Rift." Eight times in the past 15,000 years lava poured from cracks which opened along this weak spot in the Earth's crust. Expanding gases in the lava ejected bubbly rocks hundreds of feet into the air. In some cases these cinders showered the ground to form cones. Less explosive lava flowed in sheets and rivers. The lava moving beneath the congealing crust sometimes tugged the surface into folds resembling coils of rope. This type of lava is called *pahoehoe*, which means "ropy" in Hawaiian. Cooler, thicker *a'a* lava—with a

consistency much like peanut butter—inched along, twisting and shattering into tumbled masses of jagged rocks. *A'a* is a Hawaiian word loosely translated as "rough on the feet," a description worth keeping in mind as you select your hiking shoes.

You may see all these volcanic features, and others too, on the trails described below. Numbers in parentheses correspond to parking areas as marked on the park brochure. Trail mileages are round trip.

A Word about Safety

The black lava captures and radiates the heat of the intense summer sun. An afternoon without steady wind is a rarity. Be prepared! Wear sun screen and a hat and carry plenty of water. Fill your water bottles before leaving the visitor center, as there is no running water along the Loop Drive. The lava surface is uneven and abrasive, so wear hiking boots, sneakers, or other sturdy shoes.

Trail Descriptions

NORTH CRATER FLOW TRAIL

(#2) - 1/4 mile, easy

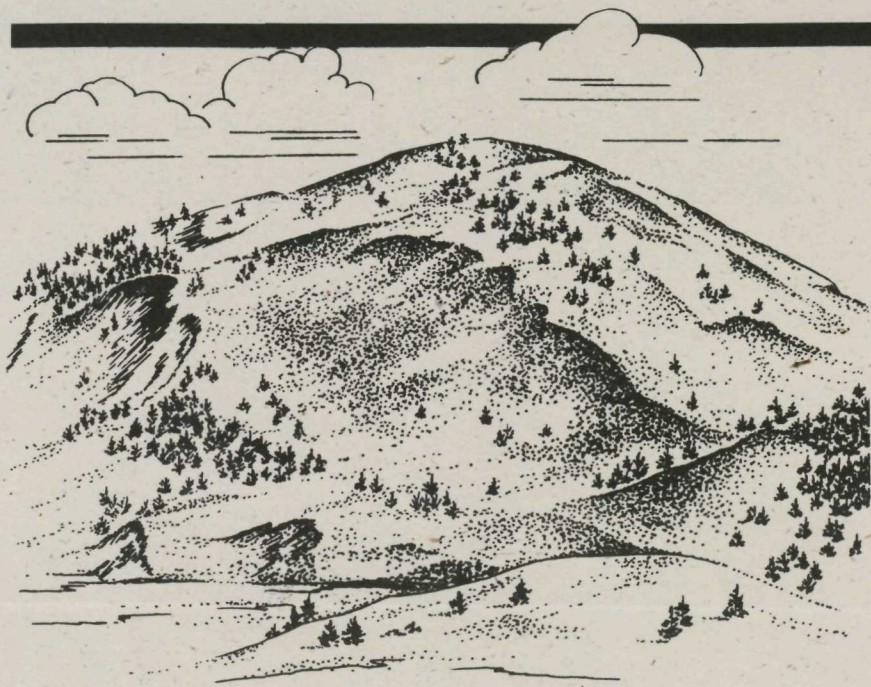
This trail takes you onto the North Crater Flow, a pahoehoe flow that spilled from the North Crater vent about 2,100 years ago. Signs along the trail introduce other typical features: pressure ridges, squeeze ups, *a'a* lava, and rafted blocks.

DEVIL'S ORCHARD

(#3) - 1/2 mile, easy

This paved trail explores an area of cinder beds scattered with pieces of the North Crater wall. Signs and a brochure describe how the National Park Service protects the pristine air, lava formations, limber pine, and other living things in the monument. This trail is wheelchair accessible.





THE WILDERNESS TRAIL TO ECHO CRATER

(#6) - 6 miles, moderate

You will have a sense of solitude as you travel into the Craters of the Moon Wilderness. The trailhead is 75 yards from the parking lot back along the road. The trail goes over Broken Top cinder cone and crosses a pahoehoe flow close to Buffalo Caves. The caves are located 100 yards north of the trail against the south side of Broken Top. You then pass a series of lava trees and several cinder cones before reaching Echo Crater. Some people backpack to this point and camp overnight. Backcountry permits are required for overnight trips and are available free of charge at the visitor center.

NORTH CRATER TRAIL

(#2) - 3 miles, strenuous

This trail is especially interesting for its variety. The trail traverses North Crater and drops into the crater mouth, the vent for the North Crater flow. Notice that the northwest flank of North Crater is missing. An eruption tore the wall apart, and a series of a'a flows rafted the fragments away. The trail continues to the rim of Big Craters before descending to the Spatter Cones. If you have two vehicles, leave one at the Spatter Cones parking lot to avoid hiking back on the same trail.

BIG CRATERS FROM THE SPATTER CONES

(#5) - 1/2 mile, moderate

A paved path leads uphill from the parking lot to the crater rim, the best place on the Loop Drive to see the craters for which the park is named. This hike is an excellent alternative for those not wishing to hike all the way from the North Crater Flow parking lot (see North Crater Trail description).

INFERNO CONE

(#4) - 1/2 mile, strenuous

The trail to the top of Inferno Cone is steep, but rewards you with panoramic views of the Great Rift, Snake River Plain, and Pioneer Mountains. On clear days you may see the Teton Range, 100 miles to the east.

THE CAVES TRAIL

(#7) - 1 to 2 miles, moderate

On a summer day, the cool, dark lava tubes along the Caves Trail offer a radical change from the brilliant light and blistering heat on the surface. Indian Tunnel, one-half mile from the parking lot, is the largest cave and the easiest to visit. Skylights permit enough daylight to enter so that you do not need a flashlight. The other caves are pitch black, with uneven floors and low ceilings. Be sure you have a good flashlight for every person in your group, and that everyone is physically capable before exploring these caves. A hat and long pants will protect your head and legs from the sharp rock. A guide available at the trailhead provides further information about the lava tubes.

THE TREE MOLDS

(#6) - 3 miles, moderate

The trail winds through shrubs and stands of limber pine before reaching the edge of the Blue Dragon Flow. While still molten, this lava flow knocked down and ignited trees. The charred tree trunks left impressions in the lava rock. In other places, the trees remained standing as the lava encased them, leaving vertical molds in the cooling lava.

